



Pay-As-You-Throw

Throw Away Less and Save



Pay As You

Throw

Do you know how much you spend per month on electricity? How about your gas utility? The person who pays the bills in your household probably has a pretty good idea. But do you know how much you spend on garbage?

Each time your city or town sends a truck down your street to pick up your waste, it costs money. It costs money even if you drop your trash off at a local dump. Ultimately, you pay for this service, usually through your local taxes. And it's not likely that you have much control over the amount you pay, regardless of how much garbage you create.

There is a different system, however, under which residents are asked to pay for waste collection directly—based on the amount of garbage they actually generate. They're called "pay-as-you-throw" programs, and nearly 2,000 communities across the country have begun using them.

What is pay-as-you-throw?

Pay-as-you-throw is a different way of paying for waste collection and disposal services. In some pay-as-you-throw communities, it works

on a per-container basis: households are charged for each bag or can of waste they generate. A few communities bill residents based on the weight of their trash. Either way, the system motivates people to recycle more and to think about ways to generate less waste in the first place.

For community residents, however, the most important advantage of pay-as-you-throw may be the fairness and greater control over costs that it offers. Do you have neighbors that never seem to recycle, and always leave out six or seven bags of trash? While you may not have thought about it, right now you're



Save As You Reduce and Recycle

helping them pay for that waste. Under pay-as-you-throw, everyone pays only for what they generate—so you won't have to subsidize your neighbor's wastefulness anymore. It's only fair. With pay-as-you-throw, when you recycle and prevent waste, you're rewarded with a lower trash bill.

Because of these potential cost savings, both you and your neighbors will naturally want to reduce the amount of waste that you generate. And when people reduce waste, that can mean lower costs for your community, since it costs less to collect and dispose of everyone's trash. This might even free up funding for other municipal services you depend upon—like schools and fire and police protection.

In addition, the pay-as-you-throw incentive to put less waste at the curb can make a big environmental difference. When people generate less waste and recycle more, fewer natural resources are used and there is less pollution from manufacturing. Valuable landfill space is conserved as well, reducing the need to site new facilities.

Are there disadvantages to pay-as-you-throw?

While there are potential barriers to a successful program, communities with pay-as-you-throw report that they have found effective solutions. Illegal dumping is a frequently

raised issue. While people often assume that illegal dumping will increase once residents are asked to pay for each container of waste they generate, most communities with pay-as-you-throw have found this not to be the case. This is

especially true when communities offer their residents recycling, composting for yard trimmings, and other programs that allow individuals to reduce waste legally. Others, particularly lower-income residents, worry about the amount they will have to pay. In many communities, however, coupon or voucher programs are being used to help reduce trash collection costs for these households.



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What can I do?

If you're interested in pay-as-you-throw, talk to your town planner or local elected representatives! Ask them if they know about pay-as-you-throw, and whether they would consider using it in your community. If you or your town's officials want to know more about pay-as-you-throw, EPA has developed a guidebook you can use. *Pay-As-You-Throw: Lessons Learned About Unit Pricing* (EPA530-R-94-004) contains background information on the advantages of

pay as you throw and provides detailed information on how these programs work. To order a copy, call the EPA/RCRA Superfund Hotline at 800-424-9346 or TDD 800-553-7672 for the hearing impaired. For Washington, DC, and outside the United States, call 703-412-9810 or TDD 703-412-3323.